

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of servicing items from a retail environment at which the services cannot otherwise be performed, the method comprising:

5 accepting a purchase order from a customer, while the customer is present at a retail facility, for services on movable serviceable items, wherein the services cannot be physically performed in the retail environment;

moving the customer's serviceable item to a service facility external to and physically separate from the retail facility;

periodically imaging the serviceable item at the service facility;

10 transmitting the image(s) of the serviceable item to a display on at least a near real time basis;

servicing the serviceable item at the service facility during the periodic imaging so that the image of the item and the service being performed are available on at least a near real-time basis at the retail facility;

15 notifying the customer about the service on the customer's item; and  
returning the serviceable item from the service facility to the customer.

2. A method according to Claim 1 comprising servicing the item while the customer engages in other activities but is available for notification from the service facility as  
20 required.

3. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the step of notifying the customer comprises generating an electronic signal that at least initiates the notification to the customer.  
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4. A method according to Claim 3 comprising notifying the customer while the customer is remote from both the retail facility and the service facility.

5. A method according to Claim 3 wherein the step of generating the signal and notifying the customer is selected from the group consisting of paging a pager, calling a cellular phone; sending electronic mail, and combinations of these methods.

5        6. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the step of imaging the serviceable item at the service facility comprises imaging the item on a continuous real-time basis.

7. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the step of transmitting the images comprises posting the images on a display at the retail facility.

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8. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the step of transmitting the images further comprises transmitting the images to the customer while the customer is remote from both the retail facility and the service facility.

15        9. A method according to Claim 1 wherein step of transmitting the images further comprises transmitting the images on electronic demand from customer.

10. A method according to Claim 1 wherein step of transmitting the images is initiated by the service center.

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11. A method according to Claim 1 wherein step of transmitting the images is initiated by the retail center.

12. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the step of transmitting the images  
25 comprises transmitting the images to a display unit carried by the customer.

13. A method according to Claim 1 wherein step of returning the item to the customer comprises returning the item at a third location other than the retail facility and other than the service facility.

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14. A method according to Claim 1 wherein each step of the method is performed for a plurality of customers with a plurality of moveable serviceable items, resulting in multiple items at different stages of service, thereby requiring a plurality of imaging and notification signals communicated between the retail facility, the service facility, and the customers.

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15. A method according to Claim 1 wherein prior to the step of accepting a purchase order, the method includes the step of accepting a service appointment from the customer.

16. A method of providing automobile upkeep and replacement services in a retail  
10 mall environment, the method comprising:

accepting a purchase order for automobile upkeep and replacement services from a customer while the customer is present at an indoor facility inside of a retail mall;

moving the customer's automobile to a service facility external to the retail mall;

periodically imaging the customer's automobile at the service facility;

15 transmitting the image(s) of the customer's automobile to a display on at least a near real time basis;

servicing the automobile at the service facility during the periodic imaging;

notifying the customer about the service; and

returning the automobile from the service facility to the customer.

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17. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of moving the customer's automobile comprises driving the automobile from the mall parking lot to the remote service facility for the customer.

25 18. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of moving the customer's automobile comprises driving the automobile from the mall parking lot to a remote service facility that is physically separated from the retail mall.

19. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of moving the customer's automobile comprises transporting the automobile to a remote service facility that is located underground.

5        20. A method according to Claim 16 wherein step of transmitting the images further comprises transmitting the images on electronic demand from customer.

21. A method according to Claim 16 wherein step of transmitting the images is initiated by the service facility.

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22. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of transmitting the images is initiated by the indoor facility.

23. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of transmitting the image(s) of  
15 the customer's automobile to the indoor facility comprises transmitting the image to a display at the indoor facility at which the purchase order was accepted.

24. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of transmitting the image(s) of the customer's automobile to comprises transmitting the image to a display unit carried by  
20 the customer.

25. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of notifying the customer is selected from the group consisting of paging a pager, calling a cellular phone, sending electronic mail, and combinations of these methods.

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26. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of notifying the customer comprises notifying the customer when the service is complete.

27. A method according to Claim 16 wherein the step of notifying the customer comprises notifying the customer about the condition of the automobile and seeking the customer's authorization for particular services.

5        28. A method according to Claim 16 wherein each step of the method is performed for a plurality of customers with a plurality of automobiles, resulting in multiple automobiles at different stages of service, thereby requiring a plurality of imaging and notification signals communicated between the indoor facility, the service facility, and the customer.

10       29. A method according to Claim 16 wherein prior to the step of accepting a purchase order, the method includes the step of accepting a service appointment from the customer.

30. A service center for offering short turnaround services on particular serviceable  
15 items in an environment in which the services cannot otherwise be performed on those items, said service center comprising:

        a retail facility for providing access to customers seeking services on moveable serviceable items, said retail facility lacking capabilities to provide the services therein;

        a remote service facility with service capabilities for the movable serviceable items,  
20 said service facility being external to said retail facility;

        imaging facilities at said service facility for periodic imaging of the movable serviceable items at said remote service facility on at least a near real-time basis;

        a connection, at least portions of which are electronic, for transmitting the images from said remote service facility to a display; and

25        displays at said retail facility for showing images received from said service facility on at least a near real-time basis so that the remotely-provided services can be monitored at said retail facility.

31. A service center according to Claim 30 wherein said retail facility is inside of an  
30 enclosed shopping mall.

32. A service center according to Claim 30 wherein said remote service facility is physically removed from said retail facility.

33. A service center according to Claim 30 wherein said remote service facility is  
5 underground.

34. A service center according to Claim 30 further comprising a means for generating a signal notifying a customer that services have been performed at the remote service facility.  
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35. A service center according to Claim 30 further comprising a means for transmitting the periodic images from said remote service center to a display at the retail facility.

15 36. A service center according to Claim 30 further comprising a means for transmitting the periodic images from said remote service facility to a customer display.

37. A service center according to Claim 36 wherein the customer display is selected from the group consisting of a personal digital assistant, a personal computer, or a cellular  
20 telephone.

38. A service center according to Claim 30 comprising means for transmitting the images upon electronic demand from a customer.

25 39. A service center according to Claim 30 comprising means for transmitting the images upon initiation from said retail facility.

40. A service center according to Claim 30 comprising means for associating the images from said remote service facility with a designated customer so that the customer  
30 receives an image substantially limited to the customer's serviceable item.

41. A service center for offering short term services on automobiles in an environment in which the desired services cannot otherwise be performed on automobiles, said service center comprising:

a retail facility that lacks automobile service capabilities while still providing access  
5 to customers seeking services on their automobiles;

a remote automobile service facility with service capabilities for automobiles, said service facility being external to the retail facility;

imaging facilities at said service facility for at least near real-time periodic imaging of customers' automobiles while the automobiles are being serviced at said remote service  
10 facility;

a connection, at least portions of which are electronic, for transmitting periodic images from said remote service facility to displays, wherein the images show service activities being performed on the customers' automobiles; and

displays at said retail facility for showing the periodic images received from said  
15 service facility on the at least near real-time basis at which said imaging facility provides the images, so that the automobiles being serviced can be monitored at said retail facility.

42. A service center according to Claim 41 wherein said retail facility is inside of an enclosed shopping mall so that a customer can remain within said mall while the customer's  
20 automobile is being serviced at the remote service facility.

43. A service center according to Claim 41 wherein said service facility is in the mall parking area.

25 44. A service center according to Claim 41 wherein said service facility is in a parking deck.

45. A service center according to Claim 41 wherein the service facility is underground.

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46. A service center according to Claim 41 wherein said service facility includes portions underneath the mall parking area.

47. A service center according to Claim 41 further comprising a means for  
5 generating an electronic signal notifying a customer that services have been performed at the remote service facility.

48. A service center according to Claim 41 further comprising a means for  
transmitting the periodic images from said remote service center to a display at the retail  
10 facility.

49. A service center according to Claim 41 further comprising a means for  
transmitting the periodic images from said remote service center to a customer display.

15 50. A service center according to Claim 49 wherein the customer display is selected from the group consisting of a personal digital assistant, a personal computer, or a cellular telephone.

51. A service center according to Claim 41 further comprising a means for  
20 transmitting periodic images from said remote service center to a customer while the customer is remote from both said retail facility and said service facility.

52. A service center according to Claim 41 comprising a means for transmitting the  
images upon electronic demand from a customer.  
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53. A service center according to Claim 41 comprising means for transmitting the  
images upon initiation from said retail facility.



54. A service center according to Claim 41 comprising means for associating the images from said remote facility with a designated customer so that the customer receives an image substantially limited to the customer's automobile.